



**breadfortheworld**  
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

***December 5, 2010***  
***Second Sunday of Advent***  
***Al Krass***

RCL: Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19; Romans 15:4-13; Matthew 3:1-12  
LM: Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17; Romans 15:4-9; Matthew 3:1-12

Recommendation: Don't harmonize these passages too easily, because they have substantial differences. Paul affirms that the Old Testament text "was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope" (Rom 15:4). Yet we've got to wrestle with the word – as he did! – before God's word to us today becomes clear.

Isaiah foretells a messianic ruler for Israel who will inaugurate a time of universal harmony. Psalm 72 is a praise-poem, filled with poetic hyperbole, addressed to the then reigning king. John, on the other hand, announces the coming of a fearsome, mighty judge. Only Paul describes an eternal Messiah who inspires hope, joy, and peace.

In both Psalm 72 and Isaiah 11, the ruler is partial to people who are poor. "[W]ith righteousness he shall judge the poor," Isaiah says. It becomes clear in the parallel that this means he will judge *on behalf* of the poor: "and decide with equity *for* the meek of the earth." The psalmist prays that God give the king God's justice so that he may "judge your people with righteousness and your poor with justice"! (You may want to add verses 12-14, since they bring this point out with crystal clarity.)

When activists call for Third World debt relief, they are often met with the indignant response: "We need to follow the laws of economic activity. It wouldn't be just to those who have loaned these sums not to be repaid." Economic laws harden inequalities developed in economic life. The biblical Jubilee was created so that every fiftieth year debt release would occur as part of a broad economic and community renewal. Slaves would be freed and poor people given a chance to start afresh, with equal access to the means of production.

When we press for more development aid for Africa, we're being partial. So, too, when we show compassion for those who suffer, for children growing up without parents, for communities devastated by AIDS and nations facing the crushing burden of debt payments, for farmers having to work depleted soil. All these require that the world take extraordinary steps, but only in this way will "deliverance to the needy" come.

If one is committed to preaching on the Gospel text, it is not as clear how to relate Matthew 3 to food and hunger concerns. Apart from John's call "Repent!" and his demand for deeds that prove one has repented, there aren't direct references to concern for poor and hungry people. Nor will John's image of the coming Messiah commend itself to most of us who can see how the actual Jesus clearly distanced himself from John's fiery preaching. For example, note how Jesus, in Luke 4:18-19, stopped his quote from Isaiah 61:1-2 short of the words "and the day of vengeance of our God."

If you must preach on a New Testament lection, Romans 15 provides better grist. Paul is writing about living in community, for Jews and Gentiles in the congregation in Rome. But apply this to other groups: First and Third World? Black and white? Paul lifts up hospitality themes. Is there a sermon here in which you compare being hospitable to others in our homes to showing hospitality more metaphorically? Whose food is it that we have in our storehouses? Is it all ours? Or is it food we have in stewardship from God? To whom do the benefits of technological advances belong? From whose inheritance do fossil fuel-based fertilizers come? To offer "hospitality" from our agricultural abundance may be a witness: "All good gifts around us are sent from heaven above."<sup>1</sup>

Verse 15, a benediction, is designed to fill the Roman Christians with hope. God is "the God of hope." We certainly should understand that this offers us the prospect of life in God's wondrous reign. But we don't err if we look for a hope-referent in our earthly life, in historical time. Isn't what motivates the food and hunger activist the achievable vision of a qualitatively different world? A world where mothers don't watch their babes shrivel and die? A world where no one has written on her birth certificate "Destined not to thrive?"

### ***Children's Time***

God remembers people who are poor this time of the year. There is a special place in God's heart for people who need food, clothing, a home, and who don't have enough money to pay all their bills. As we get closer and closer to Christmas, we think a lot about family and friends. Just as we care for those who are closest to us, God always cares for those who are forgotten. How can we do the same? Could we go to help in a soup kitchen, share some clothes, gather canned goods, offer toys to children who have none? This time of year reminds us that every day God asks us to remember those in need.

### ***Musical Suggestions***

Jesus Shall Reign Where'er the Sun – CH 95

Reflection from Hunger for the Word, Year A  
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<sup>1</sup> From refrain of "We Plow The Fields and Scatter," LBW 362.